

Montana FWP's comments about the HD 103 mule deer limited permit proposal

December 7, 2017

- The proposal will not result in population growth. Population growth depends on fawn survival and recruitment. There are plenty of bucks to breed. Other factors are likely keeping recruitment down, which could include habitat, competition with white-tailed deer, predators, other factors or combinations of factors.
 - FWP has an ongoing research project to evaluate a number of factors, including potential habitat limitations, survival, reproduction, movement rates and corridors and other factors that could be limiting the population.
 - It's unclear if the proposed change would impact the results of the research project. FWP would prefer to assess baseline information first, before making changes to regulations.
- Most hunters (~2/3) want harvest opportunity over trophy management
 - Two surveys (1995 and 2011) show this – FWP is considering a new survey.
 - Opportunity is important to recruit and maintain hunters, especially young hunters
 - Looking to Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and HDs in Montana with limited permits, these permits significantly reduce opportunity
 - HD 103 is one of the better areas in R1 for MD opportunity
 - About 2500-3000 hunters hunt in HD 103. Limited draw permits would be limited to about 5-15 permits for mule deer bucks, and hunters with permits would not be allowed to hunt mule deer bucks in other districts.
 - Issues with hunter shift
- CWD concerns – Bucks are 2-3 times more likely to be infected with and consequently spread CWD. Montana is now CWD-positive in wild populations, with known cases to the northeast and east of HD 103 in southeast Alberta and north-central Montana. Our historic management for opportunity in most of the state has kept buck:doe ratios and buck ages lower than might otherwise be the case. FWP believes that managing for opportunity rather than older bucks helps in limiting the introduction and spread of CWD.
- In 2016 44% of MD buck harvest was ≥ 4 point, although most were not “trophy” size
- 45 HDs in Montana already have regulations to enhance bucks (out of 165 HDs, or 27%)
 - 14 are limited draw
 - Others are unlimited draw or shortened seasons
- The proposed area is small and may not see desired results because of deer movement